

Joint Eyeglass Effort Hits Milestone

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Gene Rice,

Wanatah Lions Club member.

WESTVILLE - Lions Club members and Westville Correctional Facility inmates have something to celebrate: Through the prison's Eyeglass Recycling Center, they've recycled their 3 millionth pair of eyeglasses for people in need.

The Lions of Indiana collect, clean, sort and distribute used eyeglasses to those in need. They have been so successful, the club required additional assistance washing and categorizing the glasses.

The Lions in Northwest Indiana recognized Westville Correctional Facility as a source of unutilized manpower and, in 1994, with the support of prison's administration, established the recycling program.

Inmates who participate in the recycling program are screened and asked for a six-month to one-year commitment. One of the most coveted jobs at the prison, participants tend to stay out of trouble, and are motivated to make better lives for themselves when released.

About 10,000 pairs of eyeglasses are collected and shipped to the center each week from surrounding areas, including Indiana, Illinois and Michigan. The glasses come in cardboard boxes that once held frozen French fries, donated by local fast food restaurants. Lions approached the restaurants one year ago and already have saved thousands of dollars.

Lions collect glasses no longer in use. They are cleaned, sorted by prescription and distributed to the underserved. The Lions, who come to Westville Correctional Facility once a week to deliver and pick up eyeglasses and oversee the operation, also are active in many of the missions.

“It is a hands-on operation, from collecting glasses to putting them on a face,” said Gene Rice, a Lion

for 49 years and Wanatah Lions Club member.

About The Department of Correction

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.

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